

TITLE: **The Fisheries Information Network - The Benefits of a Cooperative Data Collection and Management Program**

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OBJECTIVE: **Provide basic overview of the FIN program, outlining why the program was established, goals of the program, how the program organized and recent improvement attributed to the program**

ABSTRACT:

The Fisheries Information Network (FIN) is a state-federal cooperative program to collect, manage, and disseminate statistical data and information on the marine commercial and recreational fisheries of the Southeast Region.¹ The FIN consists of two components: Commercial Fisheries Information Network (ComFIN) and the Southeast Recreational Fisheries Information Network [RecFIN(SE)].

Efforts by state and federal agencies to develop a cooperative program for the collection and management of commercial and recreational fishery data in the Region began in the late 1980s. The reason for these efforts was the presence of a variety of issues and problems concerning data collection and management in the Region including Incompatibility or inconsistency among state and federal data bases; duplication and conflicts among these surveys; need for improvements in catch and effort and catch statistics; lack of recreational molluscan shellfish and crustaceans data as well as highly migratory species and "rare-event" catches information; need to improve length frequencies and catch-at-age by time/area strata data; lack of sufficient data about discarded catch and the disposition of landed catch; lack of catch and effort data regarding recreational fishing tournament catches; lack of social and economic data on recreational and commercial fisheries; inability of access and analyze most fisheries survey data bases; and absence of a common forum for concerned agencies to plan, coordinate, and evaluate data collection and management activities. The FIN was designed to address these through cooperative planning, innovative uses of statistical theory and design, and consolidation of appropriate data into a useful data base system.

The mission of the FIN is to cooperatively collect, manage, and disseminate marine commercial, anadromous and recreational fishery data and information for the conservation and management of fishery resources in the Region and to support the development of a national program. The four goals of the FIN include planning, managing, and evaluating commercial and recreational fishery data collection activities; to implement a marine commercial and recreational fishery data collection program; to establish and maintain a commercial and recreational fishery data management system; and to support the establishment of a national program.

¹ The Southeast Region (the Region) includes Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, Puerto Rico, South Carolina, Texas, and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

The organizational structure of the program includes the FIN Committee, two geographic subcommittees (Caribbean and Gulf), standing and ad hoc subcommittees, technical work groups, and administrative support.

The FIN Committee consists of the representatives from the seven state regulatory agencies, NMFS, FWS, National Park Service, Gulf of Mexico and Caribbean Fishery Management Councils and GSMFC and is responsible for planning, managing, and evaluating the program.

The program operations are organized in a modular fashion. There are several modules under FIN and each module was designed utilizing the same process: program level data standards development - design and procedures; program level data management structure development; legislative/regulatory action; individual partner data management development; individual partner program implementation; and evaluation of components. The FIN program has worked closely with Atlantic Coastal Cooperative Statistics Program (ACCSP) to ensure the both programs are compatibility (where possible) to assist in the implementation of the national Fisheries Information System (FIS) program.

Some of the recent improvements under the FIN include coordination and administration of FIN activities; collecting, managing and disseminating marine recreational fisheries data; head boat port sampling in Texas, Louisiana, Florida; gulf menhaden port sampling; development and implementation of FIN data management system; trip ticket program development and operation; and biological sampling.